

PEER LEADERSHIP: LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE

A Monograph

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2013-01

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				<i>Form Approved</i> OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 24-05-2013		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) July 2012 to May 2013	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Peer Leadership: Leading From the Middle				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Brian W. Oertel				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD 100 Stimson Ave. Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The changing nature of the operational environment has caused the emergence of unique situations that require a different approach to leadership. Specifically, within Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational (JIIM) organizations, the creation of small groups of people from diverse backgrounds with a leader that has no positional authority to influence the members of the group has become increasingly present. This monograph examines the nature of leadership in a peer environment and identifies characteristics that will enable a peer leader to influence a group. The comparison of leadership theories and approaches in conjunction with U.S. Army doctrine has identified cross cultural competence, trust, humility, and credibility as characteristics that are particularly important in a peer leadership environment.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Peer Leadership, Humility, Credibility, Cross Cultural Competence, Trust					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL PAGE

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Monograph Title: Peer Leadership: Leading from the Middle

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

PEER LEADERSHIP: LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE, by MAJ Brian W. Oertel, 50 pages.

The changing nature of the operational environment has caused the emergence of unique situations that require a different approach to leadership. Specifically, within Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational (JIIM) organizations, the creation of small groups of people from diverse backgrounds with a leader that has no positional authority to influence the members of the group has become increasingly present. This monograph examines the nature of leadership in a peer environment and identifies characteristics that will enable a peer leader to influence a group. The comparison of leadership theories and approaches in conjunction with U.S. Army doctrine has identified cross cultural competence, trust, humility and credibility as characteristics that are particularly important in a peer leadership environment.

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ACRONYMS

ADP	Army Doctrinal Publication
CAL	Center for Army Leadership
CALL	Center for Army Lessons Learned
CARL	Combined Arms Research Library
CGSC	U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
C3	Cross Cultural Competency
DOTMLPF	Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities
JIIM	Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multi-National
SAMS	School of Advanced Military Studies

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INTRODUCTION

“To succeed, we must update, balance, and integrate all of the tools of American power and work with our allies and partners to do the same.”

2010 National Security Strategy¹

Throughout the course of a career, people develop opinions regarding what constitutes great leadership. Great leaders arise from many different circumstances and situations. When asked why an individual is a great leader the responses are a reflection of an individual's perceptions and valued importance of certain characteristics. In the U.S. military, there are manuals, studies, reports, and curriculum that propose the effective characteristics of a leader. In defining leadership, the Army publishes in Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-22 *Army Leadership*: “The process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”² The application of this process is subject to the interpretation of the doctrine, personal experiences and individual values within the context of a particular situation.

As a collective, the military has defined characteristics of leadership but even within similar organizations, these definitions are not universal and offer insight into the potential friction between theory and application based on culture amongst and between services.³ This difference creates opportunities for the emergence of different theories on leadership. In the

¹United States National Security Strategy (Washington: White House, 2010), 14. http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf. (accessed September 6, 2012).

²Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Pamphlet 6-22: Army Leadership* (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, August 2012) 1.

³Jeffrey D. Horey and Jon J. Fallesen, Ph.D., “Leadership Competencies: Are We All Saying the Same Thing?” (paper presented at the 45th annual conference of the International Military Testing Association, November 2003).

military, the nature of leadership flows primarily from a hierarchical organizational structure where positional power is used in directing others to accomplish tasks.⁴ This approach works well at the tactical level using direct leadership, particularly in a homogenous organization. At the operational level and above, the complexity of the organization increases. This complexity changes the environment, which may require a new approach to leadership.

The challenges of the current operational environment have caused the evolution and diversification of headquarters in order to synchronize ways and means to achieve strategic ends. This internal diversity has expanded with the inclusion of allies and non-governmental organizations. For example, a regional command headquarters in Afghanistan is comprised of multiple services, intergovernmental organizations and agencies, and allied nations.

This type of organization creates unique challenges based upon cultural characteristics, definitions of leadership, methodologies, and biases. Adding to this challenge is the fact that at the operational and strategic level the diversity of participants that are not part of the existing hierarchical structure of the military increases. Leaders of diverse organizations have to overcome these challenges without positional power resident in hierarchical organizations. With no positional power or direct level leadership, the nature of the organization requires a unique approach to leadership to exert influence.

The purposeful development of this influence amongst peers is absent in current Army doctrine. Understanding the relationship between leadership theory and the practice of leadership in this unique situation is the purpose of this monograph. To bridge this doctrinal gap requires the identification of particularly important leadership characteristics to explain the difference between peer leadership and other forms of leadership. The monograph asks, "Why is peer

⁴Gary Yukl, and Cecilia M. Falbe, 1990, "Influence Tactics and Objectives in Upward, Downward and Lateral Influence Attempts," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75, no. 2, 132-140.

leadership different from other leadership approaches?” Understanding the sources of difference in situations in which leaders operate helps to identify emergent peer leadership approaches that are potentially more effective.

As the trend of constraining budgets and reduction in organizations continues, the probability of these diverse organizations working together will increase. Our current national policy documents champion a consistent collaborative effort between US Government agencies and allies to meet the challenges of the operational environment. Exercising operational art effectively will require an understanding of each participating organization’s perceptions, strengths and weaknesses. No longer will a single service of the United States “go it alone.” Meeting strategic ends will require an individual who can integrate the “skills and capabilities within our military and civilian institutions, so they complement each other and operate seamlessly.”⁵

Those responsible for accomplishing these tasks are small teams assembled for short periods of time with individuals from different organizations and varying backgrounds, experiences, and pre-existing perceptions of the other members of the team. In most cases, rarely is an individual in charge from an authoritative position. An individual who may not be the senior person by rank or experience may lead these teams through an informal leadership approach.

A definition of peer is central to the purpose of this study. Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines peer as, “one that is of equal standing with another; especially one belonging to the same societal group based on age, grade, or status.”⁶ Throughout this study, the term peer refers to an individual who has the same expectations of output and contribution regardless of rank, position,

⁵*United States National Security Strategy* (Washington: White House, 2010), 14.

⁶Merriam Webster, “Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary”, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/peer.html> (accessed August 21, 2012).

or experience. At the operational level, this definition is important in defining the majority of the relationships that exist within groups of varying rank/grade, seniority, and experience.

This study uses current leadership theories to describe the nature of leadership. Comparison of leadership theories identifies the interdependence of theory and context. Multiple disciplines and domains contribute to the identification of the characteristics of an effective peer leader that explain the differences of a peer leadership environment. Current U.S. Army doctrine provides the accepted application of leadership. Understanding the nature of leadership illustrates a gap in doctrine. The gap identified demonstrates the need to develop peer leadership characteristics that are useful in the current and future operating environment. These characteristics identify a unique approach not considered within the doctrinal levels of leadership.⁷

Reports and studies from psychology, sociology, and business provide context and relevance to the definition of four peer leadership characteristics. The Army's "Pillars of Leader Development" provides a framework to show the various situations where these characteristics of peer leadership are applied. Historical examples provide context for the application of each characteristic and demonstrate its importance. The use of peer evaluations from exercises conducted at the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) provides contemporary context for the future development, definition, and importance of these characteristics.⁸

Group dynamics are nothing new in attempting to lead an organization. However, the diversity of the organization and the lack of an authoritative positional leader require a peer leader to rely on other characteristics to exert influence over the group. Understanding why

⁷ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 1.

⁸SAMS 13-01 is comprised of members of all military services, members of the interagency, and numerous allied nations. The students at SAMS are all field grade officers (or equivalent)

leadership within the Army is situationally dependent identifies additional characteristics that an effective peer leader needs. The nature of a peer leadership environment requires a leader who is cross-culturally competent, humble, develops trust and establishes credibility to “influence others to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”⁹ The lack of understanding of the nature of leadership and the unique situations that influence leadership techniques creates gaps in doctrine, and professional military education.

LEADERSHIP THEORY

The study of leadership is not an exact science and leaves many interpretations, each subject to scrutiny. Leadership, as previously stated, is the “The process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”¹⁰ The term process often implies a prescriptive solution tied directly to inputs, which result in predictive outputs. However, leadership is far from prescriptive and offers multiple ways to achieve influence.

Horey and Fallesen in their study *Leadership Competencies: Are We All Saying The Same Thing?* address the sources of gaps in understanding leadership. Horey and Fallesen explain a regular difficulty in developing leadership theory: “Part of this challenge includes establishing a common language for discussing leadership concepts and ensuring consistent assessment, development, reinforcement, and feedback processes are in place for maintaining leadership across our forces.”¹¹ The definition of leadership is diverse and ambiguous across different types of organizations. Even within the Department of Defense, there are five separate “definitions” of

⁹ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 1.

¹⁰ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 1.

¹¹Horey and Fallesen, “Leadership Competencies: Are We All Saying the Same Thing?”

leadership. Horey and Fallesen assemble a simple chart that depicts the complexity in approaches to leadership definitions across the Department of Defense and civilians. For example, the U.S. Army uses seven values, three attributes, four skills, and twelve different actions that occur at three different levels of leadership.¹² The lack of clarity and simplicity creates ambiguity, which clouds the concept, at a minimum, and likely clouds its application.

Due to the heterogeneous nature of organizations, it is worthwhile to highlight differences and similarities between military and industrial perspectives on leadership. This perspective in a macro sense informs the continuing debate on the nature of leadership. David D. Van Fleet provides a summary of a comparative study to determine the validity of the question, “Are they the same or different?” The results prove that perceptions of leadership are rooted in the environment in which the individual is a member. The results of the study show that the industrial group rated the function most closely aligned with relationships and interpersonal skills as the highest. Conversely, in the military group the characteristic most closely aligned with knowledge dominated the test group.¹³

What are the skills, attributes, or traits that make up a good leader? Leadership theory has shifted between two different perspectives on what constitutes a good leader. The trait approach and the skill approach have been in competition with each other over the course of leadership theory development. The debate centers around what characteristics are more important in the development of a good leader.

¹²Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22: Army Leadership* (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, August 2012) 2-4.

¹³David D. Van Fleet, “Organizational Differences”, in *Military Leadership; In Pursuit of Excellence*, ed. Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 123.

“Leaders are born not made” is a convenient trope that applies to the trait approach to studying leadership. These approaches are often referred to as “great man” theories because they focus on the intangible characteristics that cannot be learned and therefore only “great men” can possess them.¹⁴ This idea, however, inadequately accounts for the universality of leadership traits. A major study suggests there is no consistent set of traits that apply universally to all situations.¹⁵

R.M Stodgill, who conducted two comprehensive studies of leadership and its associated traits, came to a fundamental conclusion in the relationship between leaders and traits. The traits of a leader must be relevant to the situation that they are in and that leadership is not a passive endeavor, rather it is a result of the relationships between the leader and the group members.¹⁶ His second study in 1947 refined this hypothesis and recommended a balance between the situation and the personality traits of a leader.¹⁷ The trait approach is relevant to the current discussion of peer leadership because of intangible qualities that a leader must develop to sustain relationships.

The skill approach conversely approaches the study of leadership from the perspective of focusing on skills and attributes that can be learned. Following the early development of leadership study that focused on traits, Robert Katz in 1955 published an article that looked to define leadership as a set of skills which, when developed, could “train/educate” leaders to be successful. In the last twenty years, a new focus on the skill approach has emerged. A reason for

¹⁴Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013), 19-40.

¹⁵R.M. Stodgill, *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1974)

¹⁶R.M. Stodgill, “Personal Factors Associated with Leadership: A Survey of the Literature” *Journal of Psychology*, v25, 35-71.

¹⁷R.M. Stodgill, *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1974).

this is the desire of leaders to be able to solve complex organizational problems.¹⁸ In 1955, Robert Katz proposed the “three skill approach” based on “administrative skills” that enable leaders to perform in an organizational environment. He labeled the three skills as conceptual, human, and technical skills. Conceptual skills focus on abstract ideas and concepts. Human skills are the social skills required of a leader. Technical skills are unlike human skills because they deal with working directly with things. These are indicative of specialization and competencies required of a leader in a specific field. Katz acknowledges that all of these skills are necessary for leaders. However, the depth and breadth of these skills are situational.¹⁹

There are many approaches to studying leadership. The two listed above highlight the bifurcation of leadership theory based on skills versus traits. The trait approach focuses on the intangibles that are difficult to identify and even more difficult to evaluate. The skill approach identifies teachable skills which are often more definable and therefore measurable. This divergence creates the competing logic of leadership theory. Both approaches are useful in identifying characteristics of a leader. Both skills and trait approaches identify *context* as a primary determinant in the application of the characteristics of a leader. Therefore, a theory of peer leadership should emphasize the interrelationship between the context and the traits required to be successful.

Leadership as a theory and area of study is a dynamic topic that, in application, will be different with respect to various entities and structures. Thomas Cronin summarizes this point in his article “Thinking About Leadership,” stating that “leadership is not only diverse and

¹⁸Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice*, 43-73.

¹⁹Robert L. Katz, “Skills of an Effective Administrator,” *Harvard Business Review*, vol 33 (1), 33-42.

dispersed, it is interdependent.”²⁰ This statement identifies the “point of distinction” between leadership theory and practice.²¹

The interdependence of variables highlights an important component of a systems approach to theory development. When applied to leadership, interdependence explains the need for theory development in relation to specific situations. A basic premise of a system is that “everything depends on everything else.” Jamshid Gharajedaghi discusses the separation of “everything” into two separate categories: things that are controlled and things that cannot be. Gharajedaghi notes, “[t]hat the elements that cannot be controlled can only be influenced.”²² Influence within a system is critical to understand because it is the true source of power available to a leader. In peer leadership, appreciation of the sources of influence external to the team creates a broader understanding of the organization as a whole. Understanding the development of influence enables further understanding of leadership theory and its subsequent application.

One of the fundamental tools that leaders have is the application of power. In *The Application of Power and Influence in Organizational Leadership*, Dr. Gene Klann defines power as the “capacity to influence others and implement change.”²³ The differentiation of the types of power available to the peer leader is the key component to applying the characteristics of peer

²⁰Thomas Cronin, “Thinking about Leadership?” in *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, ed. Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 102-103.

²¹Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking, Managing Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Burlington, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2006) 40. Gharajedaghi defines the “point of distinction at which the behavior of the dependent system is qualitatively affected.” In this context the practice of leadership is the dependent system.

²²Ibid., 30-32.

²³Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: 2006), 146.

leadership to influence members of the team. According to Dr Gary Yukl and Cecilia M Falbe, two types of power exist within an organization: positional power and personal power.²⁴

Positional power is familiar to the members of the military. Traditionally, military organizations are structured hierarchically. Also, inherent in these types of organizations is the homogeneity of the members of the organization. This structure and homogenous population reduce the complexity of relationships and constrain the interactions that occur within separate functions of the organization as a whole (See Figure 1). The relationships that exist between different organizations continue to increase in frequency and duration. This increased interaction highlights the need for certain traits that enable a leader to overcome the differences that exist within an organization.

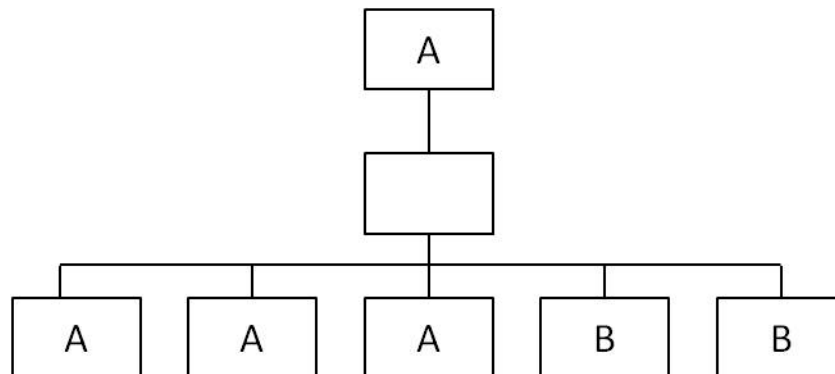


Figure 1. Traditional hierarchical organizations²⁵

The term personal power is most applicable to the discussion of peer leadership and the ability to influence a diverse group of people. Personal power derives from the subordinates of an organization. Yukl and Falbe further differentiate personal power into two distinct yet interrelated categories, expert and referent power. Within these two categories, the application of the

²⁴Yukl and Falbe, "Influence tactics...", 132-140.

²⁵John P. Kotter, *Power and Influence; Beyond Formal Authority* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1985), 27.

characteristics of peer leadership become evident in their importance and contribution to developing the power required to “influence others.”

Referent power develops because of the professional relationships that leaders build.²⁶ Relationships continue to be the foundation of effective and efficient organizations regardless of size and structure. Potentially, the need for referent power becomes more important in a small team dynamic where there is an inherent need to use all the resources (people) to maximum efficiency to accomplish a task. The building of relationships is a product of the application of the peer leadership characteristics of humility, cultural competence, and trust. These relationships are very important in a diverse environment where every relationship is unique and interdependent (See Figure 2).²⁷ These relationships become the “brick and mortar of solid organizations.”²⁸ Personal power is important to the discussion of peer leadership as a source of influence available to a leader. Personal power derives from the subordinates of an organization. The application of influence can affect the development of the relationships within an organization.

²⁶Robert C Ginnett, et al., *Leadership, Enhancing the Lessons of Experience* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill Irwin, 2006), 114.

²⁷Kotter, *Power and Influence*, 28.

²⁸Marie A. Dugan “Power” *Beyond Intractability*. Eds Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado. Posted June 2003. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/power> (accessed 17 February 2013).

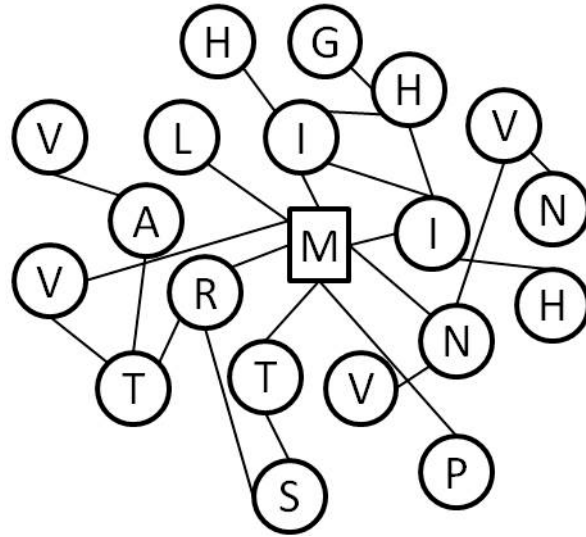


Figure 2. Interdependent, complex relationships of some organizations²⁹

Expert power comes from the cognitive mastery of a subject in relation to others. J.R French Jr. and B. Raven define expert power as, “Based on follower’s perceptions of the leader’s competence.”³⁰ The greater breadth that a leader can develop in the expertise they possess on subjects can offset the lack of positional power that comes from a position of rank, or authority. The development of expert power arises from a variety of sources. However, cultural competence and credibility can enable the effective development of expert power for a peer leader. Although John Kotter and French and Raven characterize expert power as a type of personal power, a position can also produce a degree of expert power, based on a follower’s perception of the leader’s position and expected competencies associated with the position. The capacity of power to influence an organization depends on the position of a person within the organization. Peer leadership requires this capacity to develop primarily from personal power. The application of

²⁹Kotter, *Power and Influence*, 27.

³⁰Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice*, 43-73.

personal power to a peer leadership scenario is the basis for the development of a new theory of leadership.

The application of influence can affect the development of the relationships within an organization. One of the existing balancing acts that challenges leaders is the use of transformational versus transactional leadership. This balancing enables the peer leader to guide a group of peers through a problem. Colonel USA (ret) Joseph N.G. LeBouef states that the definition of transactional leadership is “using people to accomplish tasks” whereas transformational leadership as “getting stuff done the right way.”³¹ It is the use of transformational leadership that creates the opportunities for the peer leader to expand upon their resident leadership traits and use characteristics of peer leadership to “get stuff done the right way.” Applying the four characteristics of peer leadership will amplify the leader’s ability to accomplish the mission by using resources in the most optimal way and deter negative group dynamics by focusing on getting the job done. The overuse of transactional leadership may create gaps or missed opportunities to provide the best solution to a problem. Conversely, transformational leadership is important in the development of a peer leader because of the interdependence of relationships and influence.

During the 1960s and 1970s, an increased focus on organizational development caused a parallel need to focus on leader development in these unique environments. Organizations adapted to the environment, and as a result became “flatter,” increasing the interactions of members of the organization. The development of team leadership focused on increasing the effectiveness of these teams that were becoming a larger part of the flat structure of organizations.

³¹“Development Top Among Army Priorities,” *Fort Leavenworth Lamp*, November 1, 2012.

Susan Hill's theory of team leadership is relevant to the development of peer leadership. Hill's theory uses the term "distributed leadership" to describe the concept of team leadership. Distributed leadership explains the sharing of influence (power) by team members who emerge as leaders and then step back as the situation warrants. The role of a team leader is an example of Peter Senge's concept of balancing systems. A balancing system's purpose is to maintain the status quo.³² According to Hill, "The leader's job is to monitor the team and then take whatever action is necessary to ensure team effectiveness."³³ The effectiveness of the team and the ability of others to move in and out of leadership roles based on the group's needs mitigate the traditional turnover that could stymie a team's progress. However, the concept of flat organizations and teams run counter to traditional organizational structure and culture of the organization.³⁴

Steven Metz in his book *Eisenhower as Strategist: The Coherent Use of Military Power in War and Peace* offers another perspective called "horizontal leadership." Horizontal leadership, as defined by Metz, is "the ability to motivate, move and convince coequals."³⁵ Metz makes the argument that horizontal leadership is as important as the traditional role of command. President Eisenhower adds clarity to Metz's argument: "Leadership is as vital in conference as in battle."³⁶ Metz alludes that Eisenhower also referenced leadership in conference as different and

³²Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline; The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006) 84-85.

³³Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice*, 289.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 291.

³⁵Steven Metz. *Eisenhower as Strategist; The Coherent Use of Military Power in War and Peace* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, February 1993). Chap. 3-4 available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=359>. (Accessed October 4, 2012).

³⁶Metz, *Eisenhower as Strategist*, Chap. 3.

requiring a different set of skills. The divergence of leadership may not be as pronounced as the latter half of the statement that leadership in a horizontal environment may need a different set of skills. If horizontal (*peer*) leadership is about motivating, moving or convincing coequals, then the capability to accomplish that task resides in the power that a leader generates and uses to achieve that objective.

The concept of peer leadership explains a different type of organizational culture than what an Army leader may be accustomed to, or expect, as a member the organization. Warren Bennis describes three types of organizational culture: formalistic, collegial, and personalistic.³⁷ The values and behaviors of the collegial organizational culture suggest the need for an expansion of certain leadership characteristics that could be beneficial in such a culture. The dominant behavior that is evident in a collegial culture is interpersonal relationships. These relationships are at the core of the basis for decision, control, and source of power. With respect to the comparison of a peer leader environment, Bennis acknowledges the duration of the group as short.³⁸ Relationships, credibility and trust are inherently important to achieving organizational objectives in the short term.

There is not much information written on peer leadership specifically. However, there are many theories that reference different leadership environments and assist in understanding the nature of peer leadership as a unique leadership function. There are direct and indirect references to peer leadership that appear frequently in books and articles on leadership. The goal is to highlight these as a basis for exploring a new theory of leadership related to a specific context that is relevant to the U.S. Army.

³⁷Warren G. Bennis, “False Grit” ”? in *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, ed. Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984) 241.

³⁸*Ibid.*

A NEW THEORY OF LEADERSHIP?

The future environment requires the development of a new theory of peer leadership. DOD's "*Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*" lists ten primary missions for the U.S. Armed Forces.³⁹ These ten missions will require a whole of government approach. As a result, diverse organizations will form to meet the challenges of the contemporary operating environment. To effectively lead these teams, peer leadership theory provides a set of four characteristics to apply in a specific leadership environment. The application of *cross cultural competency, humility, trust* and *credibility* enable a leader to gain influence over a group. The topic of leadership amongst peers is a common phrase within the U.S. military, but there is no explicit definition of peer leadership in doctrine. It is challenging to discuss leadership theory absent of context.

Successful application of any leadership theory is dependent on the situation. Army doctrine identifies useful characteristics. However, an increase in peer environments provides an opportunity for the development of a new theory. The absence of hierarchical structures and the increase in divergent participants creates a complex system. Within the system, the source of influence is not universal. Each situation requires a different approach to create the power necessary to influence the group. The development and use of the four traits of peer leadership create options to exert influence over the system.

Cross-cultural competence is important because it creates awareness of the difference that naturally exists in an organization. As a leader, understanding perspectives, training and education creates opportunities to communicate effectively and anticipate group dynamics. Humility is useful in removing barriers that arise in unfamiliar settings. The open exchange of

³⁹Barack Obama and Leon E Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2012) 4-5.

ideas and dialogue creates conditions for candor to occur. In a peer environment, small teams require all members to be contributors to the group. To influence a group requires trust in and of the leader. Trust is the foundation of an organization and the diversity of the group creates gaps in trust in an unfamiliar setting. In a peer environment, development of trust becomes important in allowing others to support the peer leader. In an unfamiliar setting, credibility does not accompany the peer leader into the organization. Prior experience and education are not visible to the other members of the organization. However, mastery of the cognitive, physical and temporal domain provides visible examples of the ability of a leader to a group. As a peer leader, the mastery of resources and appreciation of time increases credibility in conjunction with the experience and education of the leader. The art of peer leadership is the translation of theory to practice.

Zvi Lanir and Gad Sneh in their article “*The New Agenda of Praxis*” acknowledge the tension that exists between theory and practice. They use Aristotle’s association of theory with the “divine” and practice with the “human” to highlight the interdependence between the two.⁴⁰ Every leadership opportunity is unique and the practice of leading a group of peers in a diverse environment provides a perfect example of the difference between theory and practice. These opportunities “create new alternatives for thought and action” which can only be “achieved while thinking in context.”⁴¹ Lanir and Sneh explain the difference between the purpose of theory and practice: “theory provides coherence and practice provides relevance.”⁴² This approach allows

⁴⁰Zvi Lanir and Gad Sneh. “The New Agenda of Praxis,” *Praxis* (2000). www.praxis.co.il (accessed February 28, 2013). 8.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁴²Lanir and Sneh, “The New Agenda of Praxis...”, 16.

leadership theory, doctrine and practice to work together to provide new interpretations and learning about the nature of peer leadership.

Carl von Clausewitz operationalizes this tension in *On War*. In doing so, he speaks of absolute or ideal war and then explains war in reality. Through this explanation, Clausewitz highlights the concepts of fog, friction, chance and risk that pull war toward its real nature. Like the nature of war, the nature of leadership is contingent upon external variables that are out of the realm of the leader's control. The realization of this dichotomy causes him to focus on the nature of war, and provides principles that can serve as a starting point for conducting war.

The reality of the contemporary operating environment causes organizations to adapt to accomplish an objective. Current U.S. Army doctrine acknowledges specific levels of leadership but there is little explanation concerning the application of leader characteristics in unique environments. The peer leadership environment is a unique context that requires the application and development of different characteristics that are relevant to this specific context. A peer leader assumes a diverse team composed of organizations, cultures, ideas and perspectives. Peer leadership as a theory provides the characteristics of cross-cultural competence, trust, humility, and credibility that enable a peer leader to gain the personal power necessary to generate the influence to "provide purpose, direction and motivation to a group."⁴³

Cross Cultural Competence

In 2012, 115 international officers from 93 different countries and fifteen civilian agencies attended Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth.⁴⁴ This environment

⁴³ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 1

⁴⁴Brigadier General (P) Gordon B. Davis and Lieutenant Colonel James B. Martin (ret), Ph.D, "Developing Leaders to Adapt and Dominate for the Army of Today and Tomorrow," *Military Review* (September-October 2012): 65.

reinforces the CJCS's focus on joint education. The integration of diverse service cultures and approaches clearly creates the need for a leader who is culturally competent and can understand the environment they are working in as a leader of a small team. Additionally, the development of cross-cultural competence requires self-reflection to understand your own culture.

General Anthony Zinni once said, "Cultural understanding doesn't just help you achieve your objectives -- it helps you discover what your objectives should be."⁴⁵ Over the past decade, there has been an increasing emphasis on cultural awareness. This awareness manifests itself in pre-deployment training, field exercises, and numerous advisors available to the force. In the military, there has been a distinct tendency to relate cultural understanding external to the organization. The linking of culture in support of "partnering" and "combined action" has further emphasized this point. The value of these experiences and increased understanding is not lost on the organization. These experiences, and research, offer an innovative perspective on how culture can influence an organization's efficiency and effectiveness. The development of cross-cultural competency is important to peer leadership because it enables an inward, rather than outward, look at an organization to identify opportunities for influence.

Cultural competence, according to Brian Selmeski, is "the ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively engage individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired effect, despite not having an in-depth knowledge of the other culture."⁴⁶ In the 1985 March/April edition of *Military Review*, Colonel Maxi McFarland expanded Selmeski's theory and introduced the term *cross-cultural competence* to

⁴⁵Louise J. Rasmussen and Winston R. Sieck, "Strategies for Developing and Practicing Cross-Cultural Expertise in the Military," *Military Review* (March-April 2012), 71.

⁴⁶Brian R. Selmeski, "Military Cross Cultural Competence: Core Concepts and Individual Development", Kingston Ontario: Royal Military College of Canada, Center for Security, Armed Forces, and Society (2007)

deal with the need for understanding culture as it applies to an organization.⁴⁷ Culture is such a broad topic of discussion that it is difficult to apply universally to a particular subject of study. It is near impossible to become an expert on every culture or try to predict which ones you will work with in the future. To overcome this challenge, there are “cultural foundations” that serve as principles to frame a more general understanding of a culture.

McFarland identifies six cultural norms that serve as foundations, or points of reference, in deciphering a culture. The six norms are communication styles, attitudes towards conflict, approaches to completing tasks, decision-making styles, attitudes toward personal disclosure, and approaches to knowing.⁴⁸ Although McFarland focuses the majority of his writing on external cultures, the norms that he defines are applicable internally to an organization as well. Each one of McFarland’s six norms serves as a means for achieving cultural understanding. Of the six norms, communication styles and attitudes towards conflict are the most useful foundations for peer leaders developing cross-cultural competency to generate influence.

As a leader of any organization, the ability to communicate guidance and direction ensures common understanding. Equally important is that a leader understands the communication styles of the peers that surround them. An environment that encourages collaboration and initiative will allow for the free flow of ideas and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organization.⁴⁹ Understanding the environment and possessing the ability to assess and modify their communication styles is an art. In a peer environment, communication is a primary factor in developing the cultural competency necessary to mitigate the barriers that

⁴⁷Maxi McFarland, “Military Cultural Education,” *Military Review* (March/April 1985), 63.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁹Lieutenant Colonel Chip Daniels et al., “Harnessing Initiative and Innovation, A Process for Mission Command,” *Military Review* (September-October 2012), 25.

exist in a small team. According to *ADRP 6-22, Army Leadership*, “Communication achieves a new understanding, and creates new or better awareness.”⁵⁰ This simple sentence is incredibly important in a diverse group comprised of peers.

Conflict is an outcome of group dynamics that vary based on its members’ interdependence and interactivity. As a peer leader, understanding group development will help identify potential conflicts. In a peer environment, factors such as diversity and short time lines add to the overall stress of the organization. Part of being an effective leader is knowing when and how to insert oneself into the process that the group is going through. This is not only relevant to task oriented processes but interpersonal development as well. Susan Hill alludes to this concept in the explanation of her team leadership theory: “the leader’s job is to monitor the team and take whatever action is necessary to ensure team effectiveness.”⁵¹ The clear articulation of the task and rules for the group allows the peer leader to reduce ambiguity within the team. “Active listening” provides an opportunity for input to and resolution of potential conflicts between group members. McFarland states as one of his six norms that understanding the attitude toward conflict increases cross-cultural competency.

One of the best known approaches to group development is Bruce Tuckman’s, “Forming Storming, Norming and Performing.”⁵² The four phases of Tuckman’s model are simple enough from their labels to understand the nature of the each phase.⁵³ However, the application

⁵⁰ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 6-12.

⁵¹ Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice*, 289.

⁵²Denise Bonebright, “40 years of storming: a historical review of Tuckman’s model of small group development,” *Human Resource Development International*, February 2010, Vol 13, No 1, 111. In 1977, the addition of adjourning became part of the model.

⁵³For a more detailed description of the phases. Bruce Tuckman published in 1965 *Developmental Sequence in Small Groups*.

specifically to a peer leadership environment and the small group dynamic that Tuckman discusses allows a leader to assess and influence the direction of the group. Appropriate application and understanding of each phase provides opportunities for a leader to maximize influence over the group.

“Forming” is the initial phase that establishes relationships, where the group focuses on the task and the rules for the group are established. In “Storming”, the period of conflict within the group materializes. This could be a result of ambiguity, personality conflicts, or the “structure” of the group. The transition to the “Norming” phase is the evolution of relationships and acceptance within a group. This phase represents the onset of shared understanding and cohesion. After the shared understanding and acceptance, the group begins the task of “Performing”, adapting to roles, and responsibilities needed to complete a task. The peer leader who is aware of group dynamics and conflict potential has opportunities to use influence to navigate a team through this process.⁵⁴ Bruce Tuckman’s group developmental model adds context to cross cultural competency by further identifying the relationships that exist within a group. Awareness of group dynamics provides an increased level of understanding, which enables the peer leader to anticipate the next phase of the group and react appropriately to accomplish the task assigned.

The earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010 was an event that brought the attention of the world to one of the poorest countries on the globe. Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) operations require specialties resident in specific areas within the whole of government. The flexibility of the military to provide immediate assistance in conjunction with the leadership of the State Department combined with the economic support from other nations and non-governmental organizations created a complex leadership scenario. The Humanitarian Assistance

⁵⁴Bonebright, “40 years of storming”, 113-114.

Coordination Cell (HACC) was the primary structure responsible for the integration and inclusion of a myriad of organizations.

Who ran the HACC? This question brings to light the very nature of the unique situations that leaders will find themselves in, requiring different approaches to leadership. The HACC was comprised of a cluster system where the various agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other contributing nations synchronized and integrated various capabilities to provide humanitarian assistance. This ad hoc, short duration organization is an example of the benefit of cross-cultural competence for a peer leader. This cultural understanding provides the ability to understand communication styles and anticipate group development as it applies to an organization.⁵⁵

A peer leader will benefit from creating their own understanding of the organizations and groups represented within their team. This understanding can inform the potential sources of friction within the group, and provide opportunities for the peer leader to “monitor the team and take whatever action is necessary to ensure team effectiveness.”⁵⁶ Peter Giulano, founder and CEO of Executive Communications Group explains this ability as “examine and assist.” He offers that thinking through a problem from all sources and developing the facts will enable a solution or recommendation that will benefit the members of the group.⁵⁷ This recommendation reinforces the utility of cross-cultural competence, which aims to comprehend first, and then effectively engage in a solution to achieve the desired effect.⁵⁸ Giulano’s approach shares many common

⁵⁵Maxi McFarland, “Military Cultural Education,” *Military Review* (March/April 1985), 63.

⁵⁶Northouse, *Leadership, Theory and Practice*, 289.

⁵⁷Peter Giuliano, “Five Tips Effective Leadership through Communication,” *Orange County Register*, Nov 15, 1999.

⁵⁸Selmeski, “Military Cross Cultural Competence.”

characteristics of Carl von Clausewitz's concept of "critical analysis" or *kritik*. In Book Two of *On War*, Clausewitz describes three steps to *Kritik*: "the discovery of the facts, the tracing of effects to causes, and the investigation and evaluation of means."⁵⁹

The peer leader who is aware of their surroundings and understands the logic of different perspectives has an increased capacity to integrate members of a team. To become culturally competent is to take the next leap in learning. The culturally competent peer leader not only understands what is different, but also can explain why it is different. This increased level of competence with "cultures" enables the peer leader to engage in an active role that furthers the understanding of the group and reduces the uncertainty and "fog" inherent in group dynamics. Members of a team that understand and appreciate the differences continue to increase organizational efficiency without barriers or boundaries that inhibit the critical skills of communication and developing understanding needed to achieve an objective. The development of cross-cultural competency facilitates effective peer leadership.

Trust

Numerous qualities define a trustworthy person. The vast characteristics that surround this quality speak to the perception of trust. This perception suggests that earning and maintaining trust can be a tenuous balance for a leader. Gaining trust is an arduous task and it can vanish in a minute. A diverse group increases the number of differing perceptions of what defines trust in a leader. More importantly, there are differences in the "non-negotiables" that can lead to trust evaporating from a group unbeknownst to the peer leader.

Army doctrine as well as the Army's guiding philosophy of Mission Command describes trust as a key component in the ability to lead and execute operations. The recently published

⁵⁹Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 156.

ADP 1, The Army, articulates trust as the fundamental building block of the army profession. According to ADP1: “Trust is the core intangible needed by the Army inside and outside the profession.”⁶⁰ There is, however, little association with developing or maintaining trust within the context of heterogeneous organizations. Peer leadership requires trust as a characteristic to create influence within a group.

The success of human relationships depends on the trust that develops between the members of an organization. In traditional organizations, trust develops through common understanding, experiences and beliefs. Organizational culture has a significant impact on the speed at which trust manifests itself within an organization. Trust therefore, is difficult to develop and sustain within a non-traditional team or organization. This dynamic is particularly important for a team formed at the operational level with a peer leader who has no positional power to influence other members of the team. For the members of the team, there may be an inability to relate to the leader because of the diversity within the organization.

There are multiple theories that discuss the relationship between building organizational teams and the importance of trust. A theory that is directly applicable to the peer environment is the “Five Tier Model.” The “Five Tier Model” aligns hierarchically elements that work towards building non-traditional teams.⁶¹ This model posits that the leader, communication, understanding and trust build successful nontraditional teams.⁶² Without a good leader, communication, and understanding it is difficult to build trust within a diverse organization.

⁶⁰Department of the Army, *ADP 1, The Army* (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, September 2012), 2-2.

⁶¹US Army Command and General Staff College. "Building Organizational Teams," *L100 Book of Readings* (Fort Leavenworth: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2011), 6.

⁶²*Ibid.*

The main component in building trust in an organization is a leader's candor. Candor is essential to the development of trust in a diverse organization that will most often be together only for a short period under a demanding timeline. Currently, Army doctrine does not define candor. However, *Merriam Webster's Dictionary* defines candor as "unreserved, honest or sincere expression."⁶³ Candor is universally important in building trust in organizations; however, the dynamics of the peer leadership environment enhance the importance of this characteristic.

Candor is most difficult where communication does not flow freely. The free flow of open communication directly impacts the character of the organization. Unfortunately, many institutional cultures make candor unappealing to strive for within an organization. This may be due to a conflation of candor and disagreement. Introducing a culture of candor opens the lines of communication that allow a collaborative approach toward a problem.

In assessing the opportunity for candor to occur, Warren Bennis, in his article "Building a Culture of Candor," proposes the fundamental question of "Who is talking to whom?"⁶⁴ Although elementary at its core, it uncovers the underpinning culture that exists within an organization. The result of this question in most organizations is that information flows down. Often times, upward and lateral information flow does not occur. In a small group setting, this multi-directional flow of information is critical to the overall success of the team in accomplishing the task and is a direct result of the presence of candor. Not promoting candor can leave members of the organization as outliers, damaging the relationships that peer leaders rely on to influence the

⁶³ Merriam Webster, "Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/candor.html> (accessed April 3, 2013).

⁶⁴ Warren Bennis, "Building a Culture of Candor: A Crucial Key to Leadership," The Conference Board Annual Essay, 2004, 2.

group. Bennis offers two ideas to use as tools to overcome this obstacle, “great leaders ask not to be spared” and “rewarding principled dissidents.”⁶⁵

In the culture of the Army, there is a tendency to marginalize the people who routinely disagree with the consensus of the group. Often these people are viewed as impediments to the overall success of the group who prevent the team from moving forward. Warren Bennis instead thinks, “they should be rewarded.”⁶⁶ The ability of a leader to encourage candor within their team provides an opportunity to all to contribute to the direction of the team, adding value to all the members as an active participant within that group. Creating a candid environment requires the leader to be self-aware and prepared for the true “openness of ideas” and foster a positive climate that separates the emotional from the professional rhetoric that is useful to all.

In a diverse group dynamic, the ability to gain trust is a daunting task. How do members of the group know the leader has their best interest in mind when they come from a separate background or service? No doubt trust is a critical component of leadership in any capacity or level. However, the establishment of trust in a peer environment requires attention to some key components that assist in transcending the temporal demands and the ambiguity that exist in that type of environment. Peer leaders must understand that trust within diverse organizations will develop between each member of the team based on numerous factors. Past experience, perceptions, and personalities do matter and recognition of this truth enables the effective maintenance of a team for the peer leader. The ability of leaders to make decisions is in direct relation to the totality of the information they have at a given point in time. As a result, a climate that fosters open communication will assist the peer leader in accurately assessing a situation and communicating clearly the guidance required to move the team forward.

⁶⁵Ibid., 3-4.

⁶⁶Bennis, “Building a Culture of Candor,” 4.

Humility

As theories of leadership have alternated between skills and traits, so has the image of what constitutes a leader. One growing perspective found in academic and popular writings proposes that leaders have become elevated in social status and recognition similar to the image that surrounds professional athletes, or celebrity movie stars.⁶⁷ The attraction to the larger than life charisma of a leader contradicts the notion of humility as a required trait of effective leadership.

Tracing the meaning of humility across time and cultures shows its importance in the modern context. Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, suggests that true humility can bring greater benefits to an organization.⁶⁸ However, there are immediate reactions to the term humility when associated with leadership. A common belief is that humility demonstrates a lack of confidence or humiliation.⁶⁹ Early Greek philosophers considered humility as a virtue that was about achieving a deep understanding of personal limitations.⁷⁰ From an Eastern perspective, Buddhist and Taoist teachings approached humility from a different direction. Rather than acknowledging an individual's limitations, there was a need to "let go of self and connect with a greater reality."⁷¹ Monotheistic perspectives on humility offer an important distinction in the different cultural understandings of the term. An effective description of this view is found in the

⁶⁷Andrew J. Morris et al., "Bringing Humility to Leadership: Antecedents and Consequences of Leader Humility," *Human Relations* 58, no. 10 (2005), 1324.

⁶⁸Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 21.

⁶⁹Michael Comer and Merwyn Hayes, "Lead with Humility," *Leadership Excellence* 28 no. 9 (2011), 13.

⁷⁰Andrew J. Morris et al., "Bringing Humility to Leadership: Antecedents and Consequences of Leader Humility," *Human Relations* 58, no. 10 (2005), 1328.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

Book of Romans: “one should not think of themselves more highly than you ought.”⁷² A brief historical understanding of the term adds validity in applying this trait to the evolution of peer leadership.

The relationship between a leader and members of the group are central in a peer environment. Humility is a cognitive approach to group dynamics that will lower barriers in unfamiliar group settings. Humility as defined by Morris et al. is a “personal orientation founded on a willingness to see the self accurately and a propensity to put oneself in perspective.”⁷³ This definition is apparent in Major James Bruhl’s analogy about humility: “A gardener is always the student, never the master.”⁷⁴ In accord with Bruhl’s analogy, humility must be a necessary component in developing learning organizations. In a peer environment, humility can generate the necessary relationships a peer leader needs to influence an organization. If one is always a student, then the concept of learning within organizations becomes a key touchstone for developing humility and applying it within an organization. Physicist Werner Heisenberg eloquently sums up this relationship: “As a group we can be more insightful, more intelligent than we can possibly be individually.”⁷⁵

Dialogue or discourse in an organization provides the opportunity to support the concept of bottom up learning. Effective dialogue includes the insights and perspectives of all members of a group. David Bohm, a quantum theorist, studied to develop a theory of “dialogue when a group

⁷²Romans 12:3.

⁷³Morris et al., 1331.

⁷⁴Major Joseph Bruhl, “Gardener-Leaders: A New Paradigm for Developing Adaptive, Creative, and Humble Leaders,” *Military Review* (July-August 2012), 43.

⁷⁵Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 221

becomes open to the flow of a larger intelligence.”⁷⁶ Bohm uses the concept of dialogue to emphasize the point that a “group can access a larger pool of common meaning which cannot be accessed individually.”⁷⁷ Bohm identifies three conditions that are necessary for dialogue to occur: “all participants must suspend their assumptions, literally to hold them ‘as if suspended before us’; all participants must regard one another as colleagues; and there must be a facilitator who holds the context of dialogue.”⁷⁸

When suspending assumptions, Bohm is explicit in explaining that, “being aware of our assumptions and holding them up for examination” is necessary for dialogue to occur.⁷⁹ An effective leader acknowledges that some things are beyond their control. The ability to control is an expectation often found in direct level leadership. For the peer leader, acknowledging a lack of control has increasing importance due to the number of variables connected to other organizations. The lack of positional power limits the peer leader from “closing” their own system. Therefore, the ability to “suspend assumptions” helps to provide for open dialogue free from external influences. Andrew Morris would agree that being aware of personal assumptions reflects an ability to counter the beliefs that place an individual or organization above the whole.⁸⁰ Part of being an effective leader is the ability to integrate members of the team into one unit under a common vision. This ability begins with the leader and their ability to reach out to others and make them feel that they are “value added.”

⁷⁶Ibid., 222.

⁷⁷Ibid., 223.

⁷⁸Ibid., 226.

⁷⁹Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 226.

⁸⁰Morris, et al. “Bringing Humility to Leadership,” 1331.

A regard for each other as “colleagues” (peers) is the essence of the environment in which peer leadership occurs. Bohm amplifies this further stating, “Hierarchy is antithetical to dialogue, and it is difficult to escape hierarchy in organizations. To establish equality enables teambuilding and promotes effective communication for a peer leader. This ability will create a marked advantage in a peer environment. The acknowledgement of team members as peers is important because of the bond that it creates between the ‘leader’ and the ‘follower.’”⁸¹ The leader must be “...confident in his ability to be in charge without having to be the smartest person in the room.”⁸² Treating members as equal will effectively break down barriers that routinely exist in a small diverse group that convenes for a short duration of time.

As Susan Hill has stated, “the presence of a leader in a team leadership environment is to know when to insert themselves to maintain the effectiveness of the organization.” In relation to Bohm’s three conditions, it is here where the peer leader has the responsibility to “hold the context of the dialogue.” It is the role of the peer leader to be humble and create the environment for the dialogue to continue. The focus on the organization over the individual promotes an environment where all feel as a contributor. In a peer-leadership role, this results in developing and maintaining relationships that provide opportunities for influence.

Once these conditions are met and mastered, the team transitions to a “leaderless” organization where the “leader” can become an equal member of the group.⁸³ The transfer of control and or authority within an organization without a positional leader requires humility to build relationships and exert influence inside the organization. Charles Holloman suggests that there is an ongoing trend of transition from a formal authority based system to one based on

⁸¹Comer and Hayes, “Lead with Humility,” 13.

⁸²Lieutenant Colonel Chip Daniels et al., “Harnessing Initiative and Innovation”, 25.

⁸³Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 229-230.

consensus and positive leadership. There are two fundamental reasons for this: the need to consult and interact based on technical requirements and the development and use of leadership skills rather than working under the umbrella of the formal authority delegated to them.⁸⁴ This logic implies that a humble person who is open to new ideas is fundamental to the creation and maintenance of learning organizations.

In August 2012, class 13-01 of SAMS participated in an exercise scenario to develop a plan for the deployment and employment of forces in support of Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Operations in Haiti. The scenario context was similar to what occurred historically during the devastating earthquake in 2010. During the exercise, an individual who was present during the execution of the actual event became indispensable to the group as they wrestled with potential solutions. Naturally, as the group attempted to develop a solution to this problem the individual with firsthand experience became a primary source of information for the group. Although not the designated leader of the group, he became an informal leader within the team. The peer leader recognized this invaluable member of the team and created an environment of open dialogue and equal standing between members of the team. As a result, the planning team had access to the series of events that actually occurred, improving the outcome of the eventual solution to the problem.

The application of humility is important to peer leadership for the open dialogue, which assists in creating a learning organization that uses collaboration to achieve the stated objective. Through self-awareness, a leader can understand their own strengths and weakness and leverage those within the group dynamic. Abraham Zaleznik, in his article “*The Leadership Gap*,” posits that “Probably the most important characteristic of leaders is that they know themselves before

⁸⁴Charles R. Holloman, “Leadership and Headship: Is There a Difference”? in *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, ed. Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 102-103.

they can work on others.”⁸⁵ Self-awareness provides an understanding of an individual’s strengths and weaknesses. Being open and realizing that there are aspects out of their control makes peer leaders open to new ways or methods of facilitating the development of a learning organization.

Credibility

When an individual assumes a peer leadership position, it is imperative that they establish credibility within the organization. Credibility is a critical factor in the ability to influence a group of individuals.⁸⁶ According to James Kouzes and Barry Posner, “leadership credibility deals with perceived believability toward the leader/supervisor as someone an employee can trust in a superior-subordinate relationship.”⁸⁷ In this definition, the focus of the development of this trait resides in the “perceived believability.” How does an individual with no positional power rely on other characteristics to influence the members of the team towards a common goal? In a peer environment, credibility becomes the important first impression that will set the tone for the duration of time the group is together.

Credibility provides a cornerstone for relationships to build upon within the organization. As a result, credibility serves as the point of departure for the development of a collaborative and cooperative relationship between the members of the team and the leader. This relationship prevents the abdication of responsibility of team members and creates the volunteer mentality that

⁸⁵ Abraham Zaleznik, “The Leadership Gap,” in *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, ed. Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 90.

⁸⁶ Zafar Azeem, “Credibility: It Still Matters in Leadership,” *Business Recorder*, March 1, 2012, 51.

⁸⁷ Gerald T Gabris and Douglas M Ihrke, “Burnout in a Large Federal Agency: Phase Model Implications for How Employees Perceive Leadership Credibility,” *Public Administration Quarterly* 20, no 2, (1996), 233

enables a successful team to operate.⁸⁸ Often the establishment of credibility depends on experience and education. While these are important components of the characteristic of credibility, they are not all inclusive of the trait. In fact, these components will assist a peer leader in earning credibility in more visible ways. Leaders enhance their credibility when they lead throughout all areas for which they are responsible.⁸⁹ Mastery of the cognitive, physical, and temporal domains creates credibility with the team.

The nature of a peer leadership environment requires different approaches to applying leadership characteristics. The development of credibility in this unique environment is an art left to the designated leader of the team. However, James Kouzes in his article “The Credibility Factor,” offers a starting point: “Earning credibility is a retail activity, a factory floor activity, a person-person one.” Credibility does not automatically transfer to the leader, especially in a peer leader environment, but accumulates in small bits, enhancing the influence of the leader.⁹⁰

Mastery of the cognitive domain has traditionally been the way to establish credibility. The cognitive domain is where experience and education contribute to providing guidance and direction to the group. It is also the most explicit demonstration of credibility for a leader of a group of individuals looking for guidance and motivation. Knowing your craft is an often-used phrase that illustrates this concept. Additionally, this domain requires up front work to prepare for the situation. In the current operating environment, mastery of the cognitive domain is difficult due to continuous change.

⁸⁸Gabris and Ihrke, “Burnout in a Large Federal Agency,” 233.

⁸⁹Ibid

⁹⁰James Kouzes and Barry Posner, “The Credibility Factor,” *Healthcare Forum Journal*, Jul/Aug 1993, 16.

The physical domain is more of a behind-the-scenes effort realized during execution. The physical domain is about understanding the environment and visualizing the effects of future operations. A peer leader must master the resource needs of a group to provide the necessary tools to accomplish their objective. In this aspect, establishing credibility begins before the first meeting that a leader has with the group. The adage of “planning to plan” could not be more appropriate. There are great benefits that a peer leader can reap from this approach to leadership. From a management perspective, this also unburdens the team, allowing them to focus their efforts towards the task.

The most precious resource that a leader has is time. Misuse of time will adversely affect the efficiency of the organization. On the other hand, proper use of time will provide more operating room for the leader to provide guidance and direction to the organization. Mastery of the temporal domain is a key component in establishing credibility. Kathy Lacoy spoke of an example of this mastery in *Healthcare Forum Journal*: “He always had some kind of new project to work on. He could see what was coming next...”⁹¹ The ability to anticipate is an art that requires mastery of both the cognitive and the physical domains, further increasing the credibility of the peer leader. The efficient use of time speaks to the sense of worth that people get from working on something that matters and contributes to the feeling that they are value added. Leaders master the temporal domain through a clear vision and effective communication skills.

Credibility is a fragile commodity easy to lose, but this loss can be prevented through preparation “out of contact.” The key is to not to make this an issue for the members of the team, but leave the management and mastery of these domains as a behind-the-scenes effort. Deficiencies in these domains are readily apparent, yet their artful mastery is clearly recognized. Many of the characteristics of peer leadership overlap as John Eggers and Richard Geathier point

⁹¹Kouzes and Posner, “The Credibility Factor,” 16.

out: “Consistency and credibility build relationships and relationships build trust.”⁹² Effectively establishing relationships through the development of credibility is the foundation of any effectively functioning organization; trust is a by-product of the creation and sustainment of relationships present in a peer leadership environment.

Establishing credibility in a peer environment requires a different set of skills due to the absence of an established organizational culture. With formal organizational leadership, the structure of the organization provides the authority that a leader can use to influence and motivate a group of people.⁹³ In these traditional situations, the homogenous, hierarchical nature of the organization reduces the risk of leading. In a direct roles such as peer leadership where there is intimacy between leaders and subordinates, credibility is developed individually between group members and the leader. Abraham Zelenik references this risk in relation to power. Zelenik uses authority as the “bill payer” for a leader who misuses the power they have achieved within the organization. In a peer leader role there is no formal structure to provide the credibility required for the appropriate management of the team. As a result, the power and authority of the peer leader granted by members of the group depends on the credibility established.

CONCLUSION

To lead effectively in the future will require an understanding of peer leadership. Future Army leaders will need to be flexible and adaptive. Changes to the operational environment, national policy, and budgetary constraints drive the need for a new theory of leadership. The addition of a new type of leadership could lead to misunderstanding. Current definitions, characteristics and traits in Army doctrine apply to the development of peer leaders. However,

⁹²John Eggers and Richard Getahier, “Credibility, Commitment and Dialogue: Cornerstones of Leadership, *Corrections Today*, FEB/MAR 2012; 74 (84).

⁹³Zaleznik, “The Leadership Gap,” 90.

peer leadership theory addresses a unique leadership context. Emphasis on the characteristics of *cross-cultural competence*, *trust*, *humility*, and *credibility* allow a peer leader to “provide purpose, direction and motivation” to a diverse, ad-hoc, short duration group.⁹⁴

Organizations at the operational level and above continually add new members from varying backgrounds to the team. Therefore, there needs to be an internal organizational focus on culture. The diversity of culture within organizations requires leaders to develop cross-cultural competence. The leader who succeeds at the development of this characteristic will be able to communicate effectively and anticipate changes in the group dynamic.

Trust is and will always be the foundational bedrock of any organization. The establishment of relationships in organizations begins largely with an inherent trust between members. A peer leadership environment is full of obstacles that leaders of homogenous organizations do not have to overcome. Organizational culture mitigates the obstacles that exist in a peer leadership environment that affect the establishment of trust. The development of candor is a primary way of creating open dialogue from different cultures, which can lead to establishing trust. Empowering individuals to express their ideas and perspectives causes most to feel as value added and will continue to commit to the execution of the mission.

The unknowns that exist within a peer leadership environment are largely a result of the limited interaction between members of the group. In this situation, humility can help to break down barriers and create relationships. Not always having to be the teacher and relinquishing control on occasion provides opportunities for other members to demonstrate their capabilities.

Credibility develops collaborative and cooperative relationships between the members of the team and the leader. Initially, in a peer-leadership environment, education and experience are less visible to the team. A peer leader’s competent management of time and resources will work

⁹⁴ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 1-1.

in concert to develop credibility. Appreciation of time is crucial to maximizing the efficiency of the organization. Anticipation of the next action will provide opportunity to provide guidance to the team. The “perceived believability” of the peer leader increases the degree of influence exerted over a group.⁹⁵

The four characteristics of peer leadership facilitate leading a team through an unfamiliar environment composed of numerous interdependent variables. (See Figure 3) The application of the four characteristics promotes the development of influence by exploiting the gaps that occur in the operational environment. Peer leadership theory allows for the practical application of theory to a unique environment aimed at “providing purpose, motivation and direction.”

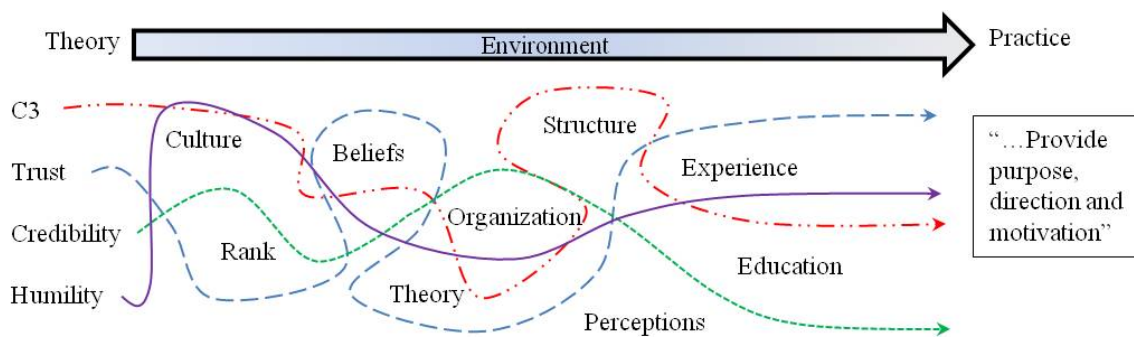


Figure 3. Peer leadership theory informed by the environment and practical application

Balancing these four characteristics enables the leader to remain adaptive and flexible, the cornerstone expectations of a leader in Army doctrine.⁹⁶ These characteristics are not independent of the other traits and competencies stated in doctrine. These four however are representative of the traits and skills that enable a peer leader to exercise influence without the application of

⁹⁵Gerald T Gabris and Douglas M Ihrke, “Burnout in a Large Federal Agency: Phase Model Implications for how employees Perceive Leadership Credibility,” *Public Administration Quarterly* 20, no 2, (1996) : 233

⁹⁶ADRP 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 2-1.

positional power. The four characteristics create a linkage between members of the group that enables the peer leader to exert influence upon the system using an indirect approach.

The CJCS released the *Joint Education White Paper* in July of 2012 that “our education programs need to ensure leaders have the ability to operate on intent through trust, empowerment and understanding.”⁹⁷ Specifically, in the *White Paper* General Dempsey reflects on the changing nature of warfare, “Warfare is changing in all domains and we have also added new domains.”⁹⁸ To successfully lead in the future, the US Army must understand the changing environment of leadership. The uniqueness of the peer environment demands a new approach to leadership. Peer leadership theory provides a set of skills and traits to serve as guiding principles relative to that environment. A peer leader who is cross-culturally competent, humble, and establishes trust and credibility can more effectively influence others despite the challenges of the future operating environment.

⁹⁷General Martin E. Dempsey, “Joint Education White Paper,” July 16, 2012, 2.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 5.

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